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Constitutional Right to Education Survey Report

The state of education in Zimbabwe and how the deterioration is affecting our children

It's time for Collective Action to Save Education in Zimbabwe

“Education is a public good and fundamental human right recognised in Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and upheld in various international and regional human rights conventions and treaties”.

Section 27 of the national objectives and section 75 of the Bill of Rights, *Chapter 2, on Education* says the following:

- (1) The State must take all practical measures to promote*
 - (a) Free and compulsory basic education for children; and (b) higher and tertiary education.*
- (2) The State must take measures to ensure that girls are afforded the same opportunities as boys to obtain education at all levels.*

Despite this Constitutional clause; consultations and surveys conducted by WOZA reveal substantial violations against the right to education by the state which is, overloading parents with a burden too heavy in this climate of economic chaos. This right is also negatively impacted by poor infrastructural development at schools, unqualified teaching personnel, limited and poorly managed resources being allocated to the education sector. Overburdened parents suffering unemployment are unable to participate fully in School Development Committees (SDC) where democratic structures, processes and procedures are not followed.

In assessing the extent of the crisis WOZA believe that no one person, organisation, political party, government department or school can solve this crisis but rather a comprehensive collective solution must be found.

WOZA therefore calls for a “Save Zimbabwe Education” national dialogue by all relevant stakeholders to chart a collective way forward. It's time to ACT!

Introduction

In later 2015, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) conducted a survey to determine the state of education and the impact on the lives of members and their children. Members of WOZA, like all Zimbabweans are very concerned about the deterioration in educational provision by government and its employees, the teachers, which means that most children are failing to access their constitutional right to a meaningful education. The failure in the education system has many negative consequences

for individuals, for families and for the nation as a whole. WOZA member's number over 100000 but the survey focused on organised structure of urban and rural adults and urban children. They were asked to provide their views on what problems they are experiencing in educating their children, to identify the specific rights abuses involved, and to try to develop a strategy on the way forward to make a contribution towards resolving these problems.

This report presents the findings; these are not quantitative, but qualitative, describing the abuses but not attempting to indicate the extent of each or the numbers of communities in which they exist. Responses to the survey have been categorised according to social groups; there are responses from urban adults, urban children, and rural adults. Thus they provide a snapshot picture of the situation that prevails in our schools from three different perspectives.

Participation Tables

Demographic	Female	Male	Total	No workshops
URBAN ADULTS	4 502	332	4 834	460
RURAL ADULTS	2 833	724	3 557	28
URBAN CHILDREN	4 443	3 859	8 302	259
TOTALS	10 332	4 292	14 624	747

Abuses/violations

The most pressing abuse is the *high cost of education*, mainly caused by levies and other arbitrarily imposed costs. In violation of government policy, many headmasters are chasing away children from schools when they have not paid fees, and this appears to be most prevalent in rural areas. Some members reported that parents in rural areas are forced to undertake manual work in the community if they haven't paid fees, the most common tasks assigned being moulding of bricks for construction of teachers' houses. Additionally, some schools have requested that parents pay the annual total sum of school fees for the year 2016 at the beginning of the year. The reason given is that small amounts being paid over a period are being stolen by corrupt school officials. The inclusion of the unfunded Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme into primary level has also strained the pockets of parents who are already failing to pay for primary level fees. The Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) programme funded mainly by foreign aid conceptualised as a support for school fees for vulnerable children is no longer functioning in most places; where it is, the payments are not transparently allocated and corruption prevails.

Due to the high cost of education most parents are constantly indebted to the schools. Headmasters' response to debt collection is to further abuse the rights of children by withholding children's original birth certificates, performance reports, and exam results and refusing to supply registration forms for the next level of education. In many reported instances debt collectors visit schools and interview children about the property they have in their homes that could be collected to offset the debt. The inability of parents to settle with schools then places the stress squarely on children who fail to continue with their education.

In spite of the high cost, *facilities and learning resources* are not available. In many schools there are not enough classrooms, and children must learn outside or share rooms through hot seating. There are not enough desks and chairs; books and stationery are in short supply. Secondary level students revealed the lack of library facilities within their communities; and the lack of reading material where libraries exist.

For some, *accessibility* is a problem. Children in rural areas walk long distances at school late and tired but the school response is to immediately punish the late comers further denying them the right to participate in any schooling for that day. Many children have been denied entry to school because they do not have a birth certificate, a document which can be difficult to obtain for some, depending on their family circumstances.

Behaviour of teachers is a major problem. Aside from the fact that there are many unqualified people teaching in schools, the attitude displayed by many is unacceptable. They are said to insult and intimidate children and subject them to beating. Some come to class drunk while others harass children sexually. They are not committed to their teaching, missing lessons, spending time in class on their mobile phones or concentrating on offering extra lessons for a fee. In some schools there is little discipline. In rural schools children are exploited to perform household chores such as fetching water for the teachers.

The low quality of teaching, absence of commitment from teachers, lack of resources and teachers failing to speak the mother tongue of pupils, failure frequently to set exams and tests, as well as poor attendance rates from those constantly being chased away to find fees, lead to *poor achievement* and very low pass rates. While some may become discouraged and drop out of school, even those who complete school do not acquire either certificates or skills which can lead to employment, thus children will also experience poverty as adults. A significant percentage of children never learn to read well enough to be functionally literate, thus compromising their life chances even more.

In some schools the teachers do not *speak the local language*, in this case Ndebele, thus cannot perform their duties properly, particularly in the lower primary grades. Moreover, the employment of temporary teachers is affecting the *quality* of education in both primary and secondary schools. Children also pointed out the lack of consistency in their learning process as schools are randomly relocating teachers on a term by term basis.

Some schools did not set exams for grade six and below due to lack of payment of fees. Children feel their right to education has been violated as they failed to get an opportunity to evaluate their performance for the year of learning.

Corruption is said to exist in some schools, particularly practised by headmasters who are guilty of nepotism, do not account for funds and misuse them. The banning of charging for extra lessons and civvies day has led to some schools developing extra-curricular activities that are money-making schemes, for instance asking children to pay for culture day. Furthermore, schools are forcing parents to sign debt collection forms and sending debt collectors to confiscate property even from those parents who did not sign the debt collection forms. Corruption also exists in ZIMSEC, causing parents to lose confidence in the validity of the exam. This is also seen in the news headlines about O' Level exam papers that are leaked every year. Even Grade Seven exams have leaked regularly.

Accountability and transparency is lacking in most schools. There is a lack of parental consultation in decision making processes. The SDCs mobilise to meetings only those parents who are known to support their particular agenda therefore most parents hear about these meetings after decisions have been made. The SDC space is not a safe one for parents with alternative views to those of the 'favourite' committee members. Some parents who raise these views in the meeting find their children targeted with abuse by teachers for the 'outspokenness' during of their parents. Many headmasters will enforce decisions using 'power over' on the parents, many of whom are indebted and unable to make independent decisions.

Effects of the Abuses

Many social evils result from the failure to access quality education.

Children whose parents are unable to pay fees usually end up *dropping out* of school. This has dire consequences for many. With nothing to occupy them they loiter at shops and business centres, engage in early sexual activity including prostitution, and contract Sexually Transmitted Infections and pregnancies, leading to child marriage. Boys engage in petty criminal activities, and take drugs and alcohol. Some of both sexes fall victim to child traffickers, others become street children. Many migrate south as unaccompanied children, others become street children and most are victims of child abuse of one sort or another. In rural areas there is a massive exploitation of school dropouts whom teachers employ at low wage as housemaids or cattle shepherds.

Children who are being forced into relationships or asked for sexual favours by teachers are emotionally and psychologically affected as they fail to concentrate during lessons. They develop a constant fear of facing the consequences of rejecting the teachers' advances resulting in them getting into these relationships.

With low achievement rates, parents in turn wonder why they should work so hard to find funds for school fees if their children are not going to benefit meaningfully. They lose interest in making the effort to keep their children in school, thus feeding the drop-out phenomenon.

Teaching has become a pariah profession, a last resort for those who have no alternative avenue towards formal employment. Many qualified teachers have left the country, those who stay continue to teach with low motivation and lack of genuine interest. The old, pre-independence pride in being a teacher has turned to shame.

The Solutions

While much of the blame for this depressing situation may lie with government's failing to provide, and teachers' abrogation of their responsibilities because they are angry over their low reward, parents also are sometimes failing in their duty towards their children. A long-term solution to the problems must engage all these three players to urgently come together to address them and find solutions. This can happen at local level, in the community of each school, at district level and at national level.

At community level:

Concerned parents can take the lead, working possibly with their traditional leaders and the ward councillors to bring together the headmaster, the teachers and the parents. Here are some of the steps they might agree on after open facilitated dialogue:

- There needs to be a coherent approach to payment of fees and levies. Those parents who require payment plans must feel free to commit to the level of payment they can afford with the blessing of the school head. If good mediation is applied there appropriate assessment of the ability of the family and if needs be the school officials could involve the social welfare department if necessary. If such processes are correctly applied parents that they will adhere to payment schedules. Due regard must be made to the fact that Government itself is not fulfilling its constitutional promise of free primary education putting the burden on parents.
- A commitment from heads and bursars to obey policy directives that they will not chase children for non-payment. These officials must also realise that they should be implementing the right to education constitutional clauses.
- A commitment from the headmasters to enforce discipline within the school staff, with consequences for teachers who miss classes or do not perform to standards
- An end to physical abuse of school children
- An end to exploitation of child labour
- The establishment of an active child protection committee if none exists
- A commitment from parents to ensure that priority is given to school work and school activities rather than household and family tasks
- A commitment from parents to allow their daughters to attend school, not to arrange early marriages
- An agreement that parents monitor the school finances, and a willingness of parents to take this as an essential responsibility and do so without fear of intimidation.
- Parents must demand democratisation of SDC in terms of procedures of calling meetings and election processes. Children also feel that parents must play a more active role in decision making.
- Parents to form a buddy system to pass information about all school activities and meetings.
- Parents to speak up when they do not agree with suggested proposals and stand their ground.

At district level

Again, concerned parents from various schools at ward level can initiate dialogue with the district education office and the local authority where relevant, again liaising with elected councillors and traditional leaders to assist. Local representatives of teachers unions should also be included. They might achieve the following:

- An agreement with the district education officer to ensure that cases of misbehaviour by teachers will be handled seriously and where necessary reported to police for prosecution
- An agreement with the district education officer to do their best to ensure that teachers who can speak the mother tongue of the pupils are deployed to schools
- A commitment from parents to contribute as much as possible to developing the resources of the schools
- A commitment from the teachers unions to work towards improved motivation of teachers, the development of professional pride and discipline.
- A commitment from the local council, where relevant, to increase allocations for education in their budgets, and to allow parents to monitor the implementation of their budget

At national level

Ultimately the long-term improvement in education depends on national policies; some need implementation and many need changing and new policies need to be created and should be in alignment with right to education constitutional requirements. These include first of all a larger budget allocation towards teachers' salaries, the building of more schools and improvement of existing buildings, the return to the capitation grant, a restoration of an effective system of monitoring teaching and administration quality, a curriculum which includes the learning of production and vocational skills relevant to the local community, free education at least for primary education and gradually introduced for secondary education and the restoration of the BEAM programme or something equivalent to assist those whose families cannot afford to pay the fees until such time as they can be totally abolished.

Some of these changes require large sums of money not currently available to government, while others could be implemented with more goodwill than money. In order to make an impression towards these goals, it will be necessary to create a movement which brings together parents, teachers, headmasters, local authorities and traditional leaders putting pressure on policy makers for the benefit of the children. In light of the UN conventions of children's participation, pupils might also be engaged and be involved in remodeling the education system. The aim of such a grouping would be to restore a desire to rebuild the education system into something that functions for the benefit of all individuals within the confines of the prevailing economic dispensation. Everyone needs to recognise that they have a role to play for the future of this generation.

Activities might include:

- Monitoring the budget of the Ministry of Education
- Organising panels and fora in which to discuss the curriculum
- Lobbying for larger budget allocations
- Encouraging research on pupil achievements

There are of course an unlimited number of activities which could work to raise the motivation of teachers and could contribute in various ways to revitalisation of education in Zimbabwe

Recommendations and Demands:

To Children:

1. Under international human rights standards children have a right to participate in and protect children's rights – Children must find their roles and responsibilities as regards the right to education.
2. Encourage your parents to attend all SDC meetings and to raise their issues without fear or favour.
3. Support each other to lean and study hard attending all lessons possible.
4. Play a role in the brining to zero teenage pregnancies so as to reduce drop outs.
5. Help to persuade parents and other children against child marriage due to inability to pay school fees.
6. Help each other persuade parents that child labour affects school work and children should have time to learn and play.

To Parents:

7. Parents to participate in school development meetings speaking out about their lived reality and to initiate dialogue.
8. Parents must not intimidate each other when they raise objections to the agenda of school officials.
9. Support and encourage children who are not doing well to improve their standards
10. Provide necessary school stationery and uniforms
11. To stop segregating and discriminating children within the family and treat boys and girls equally
12. Pay school fees for children to avoid the humiliation children they face at school

The Community:

13. Identify and support less privileged children like orphans, disabled and those in child-headed homes
14. Audit school drop-outs in the community and approach parents to ensure children go to school
15. Lobby the government to improve infrastructure development of schools

To School Officials

16. To facilitate parents participation in school affairs and ensure no intimidation of committee members. All SDC members should feel free to express themselves in the way they require.
17. School officials to investigate any cases of intimidation of parents by school official.
18. To work with parents and Child Protection Committees to encourage school attendance and the end of physical abuse and exploitation of labour at home

At district level:

19. Promote dialogue with district officials on more effective policy development
20. Lobby for higher allocations of resources to schools, including appropriate and dignified salaries for teachers.
21. Officials to cooperate and facilitate parent participation in budget monitoring
22. Report on and follow up on serious cases of teacher indiscipline
23. Officials should survey parents so as to monitor performance of school officials and if needs be partner to expose schools with particularly poor performance

At national level, all stakeholders should:

24. Work towards the creation of a collective approach to Save Zimbabwean Education and therefore allow children to enjoy their right to an education.
25. All stakeholder should join peaceful protests to raise the critical issues to keep government aware that the problems must be addressed
26. Individually and collectively lobby ministry officials and Members of Parliament
27. Work with Teachers' unions to ensure capacitation of teachers to professional levels to restore the pride and status once apparent.
28. Work with anti-corruption organisations such as Transparency International Zimbabwe to monitor the Ministry of Education budget and financial processes in all schools to avoid corruption which is fast becoming endemic.

29. Promote and conduct public meetings and debates about the school curriculum and the need to address job creation.

The government of Zimbabwe

30. To recruit more teachers to reduce teacher – student ratio
31. Publicly recommit to providing the best education system for the sake of the nation.
32. Publicly admit that the ministry alone cannot solve the crisis and embrace a collective all stakeholders’ national dialogue to save education in Zimbabwe.
33. To prioritise allocate of resources to the education sector and join the call for zero corruption in all school management systems.

In conclusion all stakeholders should put the best interests of Zimbabwean children first - it’s time to think of the future of our country.